



April 11th, 2018

Senate Natural Resources Committee

Lansing, MI

**Re: SB 763, 302, 303, SJR O and HB 4475**

Committee Members:

Michigan Environmental Council, a coalition of 65+ member groups statewide, has support for public lands and outdoor recreation as a core principal of our work. We have been active in discussions surrounding changes to the Natural Resources Trust Fund, and around the land cap. To this point we have kept them separate, as we have been having good discussions on both pieces of legislation in the hopes that we would see improvement in the language to where we could support both. With negotiations waning on each piece, it has become clear that the bills regarding public land sale and management, and the changes to the Trust Fund are inextricably linked, and we cannot support SB 763 and SJR O based on the current financial analysis from the DNR or with the current drafts of SB 302, 303, and HB 4475.

We thank the Sen. Casperson for working with us on the language surrounding aquatic invasive species in SB 763 and SJR O, with the latest language being very close to something that would be acceptable. We still struggle with the inconsistency between using money for the “control” or “management” of invasive species as part of a project for “development, renovation, and redevelopment of local public recreational facilities”.

Despite that change continuing to be negotiated, the concerns about state park funding were not alleviated, but enhanced following the opportunity to compare our numbers on year to year park funding with the DNR’s analysis. Under the DNR analysis we have seen, state parks lose money starting in year one under the structure set up in SB 763 and SJR O. Without first getting a recreation passport opt-out, we cannot support this constitutional change as it is a bad deal for state parks.

However even with these two concerns addressed, the potential changes in the latest versions of SB 302, 303 and HB 4475 make us reevaluate the long term impacts of SB 763 and SJR O when coupled with the other public lands legislation. Specifically, SB 303 opens the Land Exchange Facilitation Fund for operational use. This, when combined with SB 763’s provision to make more money from the Trust Fund available for development projects that would compete directly with future state and local acquisition projects for the same pot of money. These two changes taken together will clearly reduce public lands while also hampering the ability of the state to invest funds into additional future land purchases.

Additionally, HB 4475's provisions providing local government veto authority over state land acquisitions, means that Trust Fund Board could be blocked from making important or strategic statewide land purchases, even if funds were assembled. Additionally, due to a provision within SB 302 what creates a new land cap tied to PILT payments means the legislature could means the a future legislature could simply shortchange PILT appropriations to Treasury and prevent any land purchases north of the Mason-Arenac line.

We appreciate the ongoing discussions on these important topics, but without significant changes to SB 302, 303, and HB 4475, and a recreation passport opt-out in place, we cannot consider support for SB 763 or SJR O.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sean Hammond".

Sean Hammond  
Deputy Policy Director  
Michigan Environmental Council